

# Hands-On Elementary Career Education

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As we know, elementary students learn best through experiences and hands-on learning opportunities. When planning career education opportunities for our elementary students we knew whatever we did needed to be fun, engaging and hands-on. This led us to a touch-a-truck style career day!

What is a touch-a-truck event? Touch-a-truck events are often held by companies and communities/cities where kids are able to explore giant trucks, emergency vehicles, etc. They are a fully hands-on experience where kids get to look inside vehicles they often see driving down the road and learn more about the vehicle. I thought this format would be a great way to combine hands-on experiences while learning about careers in an age appropriate way.



[How To Plan A Touch-A-Truck Career Education Day](#)

When planning an event, it can often be hard to know where to start. My recommendation? Start by answering the below wh- questions.

- Who
  - One of the most important pieces of having a successful day is having engaging community helpers and companies! We chose only to have companies that have vehicles that our kids could explore. While this can limit some places, like doctors offices, insurance agents, etc. from attending the event if they don't have a vehicle, our classroom teachers provide opportunities for these community businesses to come into their classroom throughout the year.
    - We are lucky to have support from many of our local businesses and community helpers that jumped at the opportunity to come and share with our students. We also have parents who own their own companies who were able to come as well. Other great ways to look for ideas...
      - Chamber of Commerce, they have a list of members who you can contact.
      - Building Secretaries, never underestimate the knowledge of your secretary! Our secretaries were easily able to provide me with a list of companies/businesses that they knew had vehicles who love to support the schools.
      - Don't forget your community helpers, fire department, police department, city workers, etc.
- What
  - As you are planning for who you will have at your event, it is also important to think about what you want your students to learn? I gave my volunteers free reign on what they showed and shared with students because I know each

company/career can be different. In the future, I would want to make sure each place answered at least the below questions:

- Do you have to have any college or training to do your job?
- How did you get interested in your job?
- When (and how long)
  - When are you going to host your event? This is one of the trickiest things to figure out! We held our event on a Friday in November because it is National Career Education Month.
  - With a hands-on outdoor event like this and Ohio weather you are always gambling with weather. It will either be cold, hot or just right or it will be rainy, cloudy or sunny. We decided not to have a rain-date, but this is a choice you can make for your building. Our event was held on a Friday and we told our volunteers we would cancel the event by Thursday morning if there was going to be inclement weather in the forecast.
  - Another piece of the puzzle is figuring out your rotation schedule. We found that with our students' ages (Kindergarten-3rd grade) a shorter time frame was great. Each class had 7 minutes per station, about 1-2 minutes for transition and 5-6 minutes for the volunteer to share. While it seems like a short time when thinking about the schedule, we felt any longer and our students might lose interest. We have 19 classrooms and were able to get through 8 stations per class using the below schedule. Thankfully, I was able to get the schedule to work around all specials, planning and lunch times! The last piece of this was making sure our volunteers were able to have the bus lot clear by the time our building next door dismissed students to the bus in this lot.
  - [Example Schedule](#) - you will see some grayed out times. These were break times for each station. They were able to go to the bathroom, get a snack, etc.

- Where
  - With everything above, you are probably wondering where to hold this event? We are thankful to have a bus lot next to our building that worked great for us. We were able to line up our volunteers in a circle along the edge of the bus lot so classes were able to move from station to station easily.
  - We share the bus lot with our intermediate building, so it was important to communicate with the building principal as they use this space for recess.
- Why
  - Remember the why! We want our students to learn more about careers. Career education is important because it exposes our students to a world of opportunities to learn about opportunities for their future, even in elementary school!

#### Random Things to Note

- Provide lunch or something special for your volunteer's time! We provided a pizza lunch for all volunteers. We also made sure to thank each company on social media, in monthly newsletters, on family engagement flyers that were sent home, etc.
- To expand upon our morning of visiting each station, we continued college and career education into the classrooms during the afternoon. I provided teachers with worksheets, videos, talking points, etc. to encourage more conversations in the classroom.
  - Our PTA provided popcorn for the students in the afternoon. Students were able to have popcorn and watch videos about other career opportunities.
  - During this time, I asked our teachers to have students write thank you notes to each company/community helper that attended.
- We tied in college by having our staff wear something from the college they attended. The teachers loved this as it was an excuse

for a jeans day! The teachers also spoke with their students about college.

- Family Engagement
  - Make sure to engage your families as well! I sent home a virtual flyer to all families with questions to ask their students related to the day, video links and included all the company/community helper names. This was another free marketing piece for the people who volunteered their time!
  - [Family Engagement Flyer from 2021](#)

[Video of our 2021 Touch-a-Truck Career Day!](#)